

Romania and UK judicial authorities jointly dismantle 'loverboy' criminal network specialized in trafficking and sexually exploiting young girls




The Hague, 18 September 2020

During a Joint Action Day executed on the 9th of September 2020, judicial and law enforcement authorities in The UK and Romania have arrested 21 members of an organized criminal group specialized in trafficking young Romanian girls into the UK, Ireland and Germany for purpose of sexual exploitation.

The criminal group was active since 2009 and had a well-established hierarchical structure. Using the so-called 'loverboy'-method, the OCG members targeted young Romanian girls from vulnerable backgrounds. The victims (including minors) were seduced by the offenders with false promises of sentimental partnerships, and a future luxury lifestyle. In reality, the victims were instead lured into prostitution and sexually exploited in Romania (until the minor teenagers turned 18), after which they were transported (by use of counterfeit ID documents) and sexually exploited in The UK, Ireland and Germany. In order to conceal and launder the profits from their criminal activity, the members of the group purchased luxury assets, registering it under third parties' name.

Eurojust has facilitated an integrated approach to this cross-border investigation since February 2019, including judicial cooperation endeavors to create a Joint Investigation Team, which was awarded almost EUR 22.000 in Eurojust funding. The JIT made it possible to streamline the exchange of evidence, accelerate and intensify the investigation and carefully prepare and coordinate the Action Day's execution, during which 32 house searches were conducted (23 in Romania and 9 in the UK). Numerous victims were recovered and provided with support and assistance, and the searches also resulted in seizures of a weapon and of multiple valuable assets including five luxury cars, real-estate properties and important amounts of money.

 Daniela **Buruiana**, National Member of Eurojust for Romania, said: *"Cross border THB investigations have never been an easy task for prosecutors and police officers. Close cooperation and coordination between the competent authorities in different jurisdictions and the use of the support tools available at EU level are essential in conducting successful THB investigations. This is another good example of excellent joint work across different authorities and agencies. I am glad that Eurojust has been involved and provided assistance and support since the very beginning. Congratulations to all the actors which contributed to the success of this operation."*

Background: Eurojust cases addressing Trafficking in Human Beings

The number of cases at Eurojust related to investigations of Trafficking in Human Beings has increased steadily over the last years from around 100 cases in 2016 to 183 cases registered in 2019. This has also lead to an increase in the number of Joint Investigation Teams (JIT), which has proven an effective tool to fight this form of crime, from 31 JITs in 2016 to 63 JITs in 2019.

Romania and the UK have been particularly active in this respect and cooperated closely in 76 THB investigations in the past four years:

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| Cases registered by Romania involving the UK | 8 | 7 | 12 | 21 | 5 | 53 |
| Cases registered by the UK involving Romania | 6 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 23 |
| Total registered cases involving Romania and the UK | 14 | 13 | 16 | 27 | 6 | 76 |